"My Life and Some Letters"—Memoirs of Mrs. "Pat" Campbell

Some Remarkable Literary Documents Revealing in George Bernard Shaw an Extravagant Correspondent, Fearful of the Kindness of His Own Heart and Perhaps Soul!

Above—Mrs. Campbell in one of her most famous stage impersonations—Paula Tanqueray in "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray." At left is one of her scenes in this play with George Alexander.

Continued from Preceding Page.

a play which she will do her utmost to ruin, whom I shall have to flatter, to conciliate, to befriend on occasion when she is about to run violently down a steep place into the sea. Stella, how could you, how could you? What micrometer could measure the shallowness that prevents you from knowing what you have done? Even if I had been secretly bored to distraction I would have stayed on in fire rather than have dealt you the enormous blow of deserting you. But at least the order of nature is restored in my imagination. It is I who cared, you who didn't. That is as becomes me. I no longer look up to the queen of heaven; I tower mountainous to the skies and see a pretty little thing wondering at me. How is it that this infinitesimal nothingness yet drags at my midriff and causes me strange pangs and makes me write wild nonsense? Oh, the world itself is too light to carry the reproach you deserve. You are more cruel than a child.

"Enough, I will go to bed. I am still sleepy. G. B. S."

"10 Adelphi Terrace, W. C.,
"13th August, 1913.

"I finished my play in time for lunch to-day, punctually at half-past one. It is an old precept of mine: Do your work, and your sweetheart will never have too much of you. How I have thrust work between us lest I should plague you and tire you out! And now I am no better off than if I had thrown everything to the winds but temptation. Fool! Dupe! Dotard! Crybaby! Useless these letters; the wound will not heal. G. B. S."

Ilfracombe Hotel,
"Ilfracombe,
"31st December, 1913.

"New Year's Eve. O night of all nights in the year—of my most immemorial year! Do you remember last New Year's Eve? I am actually asking you—Do you remember it?

"Was it anything to you except that you were ill and were determined to prevent me from seeing the New Year daily in with —— and ——? I remember it; it tears me all to pieces; I believe we were both well then, and have been ill ever since. For what is this senseless walking about, this physical hardihood, this business, this going to Paris to see the dead dance, this cheese and ginger beer, this repainting and repapering but disease and madness? On that last New Year's Eve, and all the eves that went before it, there was Eternity and Beauty; infinite, boundless loveliness and content. I think of it with a frightful yearning, with a tragic despair; for you have awakened the latent tragedy in me, broken through my proud, overbearing gayety that carried all the tragedies of the world like feathers, and stuck them in my cap and laughed. And if your part in it was an illusion, then I am as lonely as God. Therefore, you must still be the Mother of Angels to me, still from time to time put on your divinity and sit in the heavens with me. For that, with all our assumed cleverness and picked up arts to stave off the world, is all we two are really fit for. Remember this always, even when we are groveling, and racketing, and drudging; for in this remembrance I am deeply faithful to you—faithful beyond all love. Be faithful to me in it and I will forgive you though you betray me in everything else—forgive you, bless you, honor you, and adore you. Super hanc stellam will I build my church.

"G. B. S."

"7th March, 1917.

"You have sent me half a letter, scrawled in a most uneducated manner. Send me the rest and I will answer it. What I have seems to be the last two sheets. Let me have the first six. There are four depths of illiteracy, each deeper than the one before.

1. The illiteracy of Henry Irving.
2. The illiteracy of those illiterate enough not to know that he was illiterate.
3. The illiteracy of those who have never read my works.
4. The illiteracy of "Eliza,"* who couldn't even read the end of her own story.

"There is only one person alive who is such a Monster of illiteracy as to combine these four illiteracies in her single brain. And I, the greatest living Master of Letters, made a Perfect Spectacle of myself with her before all Europe.

"G. B. S."

*"Eliza Doolittle" in *Pygmalion.*

"Sandwich.
"12th August, 1913.

"Another day that might have been a day! What have I shrunk into? In all these years I have hurt many people as the doctor hurt your thumb; sometimes sorely, perhaps, but never maliciously, never desiring to hurt, never without such anodynes as my wit and address could devise. I have never said anything false or unjust or spiteful, and never wanted to. And now give me anything that is false, malicious, spiteful, little, mean, poisonous or villainous, and I will say it if only it hurts you. I want to hurt you because you hurt me. Infamous, vile, heartless, frivolous, wicked woman! Liar! Lying lips, lying eyes, lying hands, promise breaker, cheat, confidence trickster! Act I.—Let us bathe before breakfast, at a quarter to eight. No, at eight. Too late; a quarter to eight. Please, not before eight. Act II.—Come and bathe. (Smiling chambermaid comes out.) They're gone, sir. What? To-day! I thought it was to-morrow. What a charming voice and smile that old sport has! He don't care. Curtain.—He does care though. How could a human heart deal another such—such a lick? This is what I have to forgive Stella; why did you do it?

"Sir George Alexander desires to know where we stand. I write, 'God knows.' Tell them that there is Barrie and 'The Women with the Fan' that tempts and does not frighten you.

"I think I shall stay here where my heart's blood has been spilt in the sand. I work well here. I sleep well here. I suffer well here.

"And you? Where did you go? Did you find rest and sleep and happy days there? If you did, I forgive you and bless you. If not, oh, wretch, I could tear you limb from limb.

"G. B. S."

Written two years after my marriage to George.

"The White Hart Hotel,
"Sedbergh,
"4th September, 1916.

". . .

"I am wandering about, ostensibly to take a holiday, really to give the servants one. —— is in Ireland. I went to Glastonbury for the musical festival; then came on here, where the Fabians are having what is called a Summer School. I shall stay here until the 16th with the Sydney Webbs.

"If you ask me what the devil it is to you what I am doing, or where I am, I reply, that if you were told of the existence of a comet, you would want to know where it was and what it was doing. Well, I am at least as interesting as a comet. In fact, I am a sort of comet: and I brandish my crystal tresses in the sky accordingly. Shakespeare, *that.* Anyhow, here is a letter; and if you don't want to read it, you needn't, as there is no business in it.

"—— can handle a pen as brilliantly as ever I could, and much more savagely. We fell into one another's arms intellectually and artistically. When we were wandering over the falls together, she suddenly began talking about you. She said you were perfectly beautiful, and she did not believe a bit of what people said about your being difficult or devilish (she had evidently met some poor trampled author who *knew*) and didn't care anyhow; you were just a delight to her. This for some reason was a great comfort to me; and to show my gratitude I told her that I quite agreed with her.

"George* wrote to say that he is now Assistant Provost Marshal in the Fifty-seventh. As the Provost Marshal hangs people, I presume that the Assistant cuts them down. He also shoots Skeffingtons and quite unconsidered Irish persons. Why does George take on these jobs instead of insisting on being at least a Lieutenant-General D.S.O. (Dug Solemnly Out). Such modest devotion invites depreciation in this blessed realm. If I meet Winston I shall tell him that George has developed an extraordinary talent for writing, and that he is just finishing a book called 'The Truth About Antwerp,' which will make a sensation. Winston will make him a Brigadier to prevent his completing the work —which, by the way, he ought to write. A good natured officer who may be depended on to play the game is officially classed as negligible. But let him write a book, or become military correspondent to a big daily ——! My word! Why doesn't he do it? If he can write a play he can write a book, *a fortiori.*

"And now, where are *you*, and what are *you* doing? It seems unnatural that I should not know—even still.

"Forgive this small writing. Use a magnifying glass and it will be quite legible.

"G. B. S."

*My husband.

"4th January, 1913.

"Dearest Liar, I have found you out. You have been tormenting me for weeks because I wrote odious things about you in the past and because I did not come to you sooner; and I, poor timid soul, always ready to believe that I was callous and brutal in those days, have squirmed with remorse. Well, yesterday—— wanted a copy of that American reprint of my *Saturday Review* articles which I so dread, and I got it for him. And before I sent it away I screwed up my courage and forced myself to read the articles about you. And what a revelation! What a relief! What a triumph! Never did a man paint his infatuation across the heavens as I painted mine for you, rapturously and shamelessly. Not a line would have jarred with my wildest letters to you. First 'Tanqueray.' Sweep this silly piece away and let us hear this glorious woman play, it is only an unbearable interruption to her. Then 'Ebbsmith,' smashed, pulverized, flung into the dustbin; it proves nothing but that Mrs. Campbell is a wonderful woman. Then 'Romeo and Juliet.' Mrs. Campbell danced like 'the daughter of Herodias.' Away with the play, away with Shakespeare, away with 'Juliet'; nothing of it remains except her dance, and that shall endure forever. Then I came to 'Michael and His Lost Angel,' and I trembled, for I well remember how Jones read that play to me, and what he had done for you (by this I mean, how much pains he had taken to write the part for you), and what he hoped from you, and how he was at the height of his achievement then, and how heartlessly you flung him aside and trampled upon him. And he had been entirely kind and helpful to me. I said to myself, 'I cannot have forgiven her for this; I dare not read the next notice.' But I nerved myself, and did; the notice of 'For the Crown.' Criticism? Just Gods! a mad rapture of adoration. Not even silence about Jones, but an open declaration that the sacrifice was worth it if only it pleased you. Ten thousand Joneses and Pineros and Shakespeares were nothing in comparison. I would not hear even of your acting. 'On the highest plane one does not act, one is.' I would not have even 'Juliet'; Stella, Stella, nothing but Stella. Nothing that you could do was wrong; everything was a glory. And you, wretch, dare reproach me for this because I did not say, 'Mrs. Campbell's rendition of the potion scene was sound and scholarly, and her readings of the text were original and profound.' That was what you wanted, Mrs. Crummles. And I rolled Pinero in the dust beneath your feet (the feet I kissed with my pen), and told Jones publicly that he was fortunate to be insulted by you; and these two men are my friends and have never breathed a reproach, while you say that I treated you shamefully and did not appreciate you. Are you not afraid of drawing down lightning on yourself? I! I, who burned up Shakespeare so that his sparks might whirl about you in a halo of glory. Did I not come to you? Did I not march in your train with all my trumpets in D major and my trombones in D flat major? . . . Even Duse threw me a haughty word; but you resented my inadequacy when I, the greatest critic in the world, had proclaimed you the most wonderful woman. You even persuaded me that I had been cold and mistrustful; that my love for you is a new thing. It shines in every line I wrote about you. It goes back for years and years and years. And yet it was nothing to what I feel now. It's quite true that I did not know you deeply and nearly then; but I did adore you and sing dithyrambs to you as a goddess. I challenge you passionately to produce one word that has ever been written of you by anybody that is more abandoned in its confession, that shouts more recklessly to all the world that the writer is your utter captive.

"Now, let me be sane a moment. I am in custody down here; but to-morrow I come up for the committee of the Society of Authors, and when that is over I dine with the B—— at 6, and I must catch the 10 o'clock train from King's Cross. I have things to discuss with B——, but they need not keep me later with him than halfpast 7. And from 8 to 9:25 I might be in paradise. It is ever so long since we last met, and I have a million things to say. For instance—that you are my most tranquillizing friend, and that I will delight in you, whether you are kind or unkind, long after 'all the seas gang dry, my love.' And so good night, with unfathomable blessings.

"G. B. S."

Paragraphs by Mrs. Campbell

SOME one else must write about my faults. They will, perhaps, be kinder to me than I could be to myself.

But I can say this—I shall die wiser than I was born. I have learned a few things.

I do not doubt the truth that a man "with arms of brass, a head of sweetcake, becomes fudge" early. . . .

People we love must be loved as they are. It is a want both of wisdom and courage on our part, a sort of drug, this willful blindness, to blame them because they fail our vision of them. . . .

I feel with Robert Louis Stevenson. I think it was he who said, "The greatest beggar is the man who has no words."

I have found if you thrust wisdom upon youth it hurts and frightens them. They must gather wisdom slowly, in laughter, with tears.

I remember a little bird beautifully made of wool my mother kept on her window sill. I said, "Darling, that is so dirty and old, why don't you throw it away?" She said, "No, I cannot, some one took so much trouble to make it."

It is just that effort to make "beautifully," which is to "give" and is the greater part of inspiration.

"To make," "to take," and "to have" is the devil's inspiration.

This is a good foundation for art criticism.

The English dignity and reserve do not impress me. It is their cool mental courage and control that make them the "whitest" race. They are clever without cunning, and they meet injury without treachery. Mix the blood with Irish or Welsh and these qualities become contaminated.

I thought that untruthful people would at least listen to truth. Not a bit of it.

My want of interest and curiosity in things that are ugly has left me ignorant of a great deal of useful knowledge.

Next week on this page Mrs. Campbell goes back to the beginning, and tells us of her early days in India, Texas, and London. She describes, as only a woman can, those romantic days when she and young Pat Campbell thought the world and all its vastness was just for they two. Later on there came into her life the debonair George Cornwallis West. But to the British public Mrs. Campbell always remained "Mrs. Pat." It seems as though we speak of a stranger when we refer to Mrs. George Cornwallis West.

Few people have ever known how tragic were those early days in the life of the ambitious young woman when the glamour of her romance wore away and actualities began to present themselves and the ambitious young girl found herself struggling to help a husband who was ill and relatives who were unfortunate.

Out of this tragic circumstance there was born one of the world's great stage successes and one of its great actresses—for it was the husband in Africa and the relatives at home that led her to attempt "The Second Mrs. Tanqueray." She tells us how she was chosen to play this part after almost every other prominent actress had refused it, and even after nearly all London theaters had refused to allow this play to be staged on their boards. It was one of those dramatic incidents that make Mrs. Campbell's memoirs so fascinating, not only for their literary excellence but for their intimate disclosures.